

STATEMENT OF
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COMMANDING GENERAL, I MARINE EXPEDITIONARY FORCE
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
BEFORE THE
SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON READINESS
ON
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CONCERNING READINESS

Good afternoon. I am Lieutenant General Bruce B. Knutson, Jr., the Commanding General of I Marine Expeditionary Force (I MEF). I appreciate the opportunity to discuss with you the combat readiness of I MEF, a Marine air-ground task force, which integrates four functional elements: ground combat, air combat, combat service support, and command and control into one cohesive, task organized unit. Combat readiness is our number one priority at I MEF and the Marines, Sailors, and their families assigned to this command are my primary focus. Your generosity over the past three years, providing additional funding through supplemental readiness “plus-ups” and your continued vigilance regarding our readiness has been of tremendous benefit to I MEF.

Over the past year America has asked I MEF Marines to respond to crises in a number of different settings, in a number of distant locations, and against a wide variety of threats to our national security. From February through June 1998, I MEF Marines were stationed in Kuwait as a deterrent to Iraq. During that same time, at the request of the United States Ambassador to Kenya, I MEF led a joint task force (JTF) to help distribute food and supplies to unseasonably flooded regions of Kenya. Following these two crises, a I MEF Marine Expeditionary Unit (MEU) conducted a noncombatant evacuation operation (NEO) arising from mounting tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and evacuated 172 men, women, and children. In December, Marines from I MEF participated in Desert Fox, giving the Commander-in-Chief, Central Command, a powerful warfighting asset to help enforce U.N. resolutions vis a vis Iraq. And since

December, I MEF Marines have been conducting security operations in Nairobi, Kenya in response to the terrorist bombing of the United States Embassy. In short, I MEF proved its value to the Nation once again.

This value comes at a cost. It comes at the cost of long-term readiness, or the “wellness” of our organization. In order to maintain the readiness our Nation expects and the readiness we demand of ourselves as Marines, we’ve had to sacrifice some future readiness. We’re living on the edge—ready today, but worried about tomorrow. Today I MEF is ready to answer your “911” call; to deploy and employ expeditionary ready air and ground forces capable of conducting missions across the spectrum of conflict; from disaster relief to major theater war (MTW).

Let me highlight a few facts about the history and organization of I MEF. It is the Marine Corps largest operational force consisting of over 45,000 Marines and Sailors. Headquartered at Camp Pendleton, CA, it is comprised of a balanced air, ground and support team with units located at six bases throughout southern California and Arizona. Our mission: to deploy and employ naval, expeditionary, ready, air-ground task forces to the Pacific Command (PACOM) and Central Command (CENTCOM) areas of responsibility (AORs) in response to CinC/Component Commander taskings, to operate in joint/combined operations, to conduct small scale contingencies, and to win in combat. I MEF is structured to serve as a joint task force, capable of operating ashore as the command element of multiple joint or combined divisions. I MEF also sources Marine Expeditionary Units (Special Operations Capable) (MEU (SOC)s), which gives the Nation forward presence and immediate crisis response. The MEF’s forward-leaning

posture has, on average, about 10,000 Marines and Sailors forward deployed at any given time. In the event of a MTW I MEF is tasked with organizing a combat force of up to several divisions, aircraft wings, and force service support groups, which can respond on short notice to a trouble spot anywhere in the world. We also spend a great deal of time at I MEF preparing for lesser regional contingencies, such as humanitarian assistance/disaster relief operations and the consequence management of the release of nuclear, biological or chemical contaminants.

To do all this, I MEF uses a significant Reserve Force augmentation element, which routinely trains to the same core competencies as active duty Marines and Sailors. This provides the command with operational and organizational depth during a crisis. This Total Force concept is a necessary component to the success of all I MEF operations. In fact, without reserve help, I MEF cannot meet its commitments around the world.

The human cost to maintain a force at such a constant state of readiness is high. Combined with the necessity to train the I MEF team through service, joint, and combined exercises and by maintaining a forward presence that supports several CinCs, our Marines, on average, are deployed 25-30 percent of the time. Maintaining that level of OPTEMPO is not easy—it is hard on families, on individual Marines, and on our equipment. I would like to briefly expand on these issues.

First, I am concerned about the individual Marine and Sailor. As stated earlier, our Marines and Sailors are our most precious assets and too often they are getting shortchanged in their ability to do their job. During a typical post-deployment period

(sometimes referred to as the “recovery phase” of a deployment) a 12 to 14 hour workday, 6 days per week, is not uncommon. There is a balance between maintaining equipment and using the equipment to train. We must do the former to enable the latter but, lately, we have found ourselves fixing things more than using them. After training and recovery maintenance, our Marines should be home with their families, but instead they are rebuilding parts that are too old to be found in the supply system. Also, much of our training infrastructure and range facilities are in need of repair or improvement. We know the value of quality and challenging training facilities but we constantly find ourselves shortchanging our training infrastructure by spending money on maintenance and replenishment. For example, 4 of the 17 Remoted Target Systems (RETS) ranges planned for Camp Pendleton are unfunded. These ranges provide interactive and automated systems, which augment and in some cases, replace the requirement for live-fire training. But instead of using the latest that technology has to offer, we must make do with the stationary tire targets that our forefathers used in WWII. This is what I mean when I say that a high operations tempo, with a concomitant high maintenance cost, often robs money from the kind of future readiness improvements we need to stay ready and capable well into the next century.

A related concern is the need for comfortable and safe housing. The geographical relocation and consolidation of thousands of Marines in the southern California region (transferring from four to two major bases) has forced many of our Marines to live off base. As a result, many of our Marines have less money in their pockets because of the high cost of rent in the region. The southern California region is experiencing its highest

occupancy rates in recent history, which drives up rent or causes our personnel to live further from the base. It is not uncommon for Marines working at Miramar to live in the Riverside or Orange County areas, an 80 mile, 90 minute commute.

The state of I MEF's aging equipment is another concern. In simple terms, the primary equipment that lets us do our jobs continues to get older. As a result, each year we spend more of our Operations & Maintenance (O & M) funds on maintenance costs. Thankfully, some help is on the way. New items of equipment, which you have funded, such as the new variant of the logistics vehicle system (LVS), the Mk-18 container hauler trailer, and the palletized loading system flatrack have arrived at I MEF. Additionally we are now receiving the new Javelin anti-tank missile system, which will add punch to our already formidable firepower and the new variant of the high mobility multi-purpose wheeled vehicle (HMMWVA2) is scheduled to soon begin arriving at I MEF. These new systems will greatly enhance our combat effectiveness and we truly appreciate this support, but it may not be enough.

Recent lack of funding in the Marine Corps' procurement budget has resulted in a slow pace at which new and replacement items of equipment are fielded to the operating forces. As a result, while awaiting replacements, we are forced to retain old items past their life expectancy. This drives up maintenance costs and maintenance man-hours, which are increasing at an accelerating rate. Many of our major equipment end items are old. For example, our 155 mm howitzers, 5-ton trucks, and HMMWVs are all within 3 years of their programmed service lives. Our tank retrievers and amphibious assault vehicles (AAVs) have already exceeded their programmed service lives on average by 2

and 8 years respectively. Recently the procurement budget has begun to brighten. It is a start on the road to recovery and for that I thank you.

The high state of readiness of our aging equipment has been paid for out of replenishment and replacement and “quality of life” accounts. Whereas maintenance of equipment is generally the last item to be sacrificed, replenishment and replacement is generally the first. In I MEF the replenishment and replacement account is used to buy replacements for individual equipment items such as helmets, flack jackets, etc., and end item parts (i.e., vehicle components such as canvas, seat cushions, fire extinguishers, etc.). Typically, a battalion’s entire budget is required to support training and maintenance of equipment. There is not enough money to support the planned replacement of equipment worn out in everyday service. Instead of funding replacement of a portion of individual equipment annually, we must rely instead on year-end funds, occasional windfalls, scavenging for excesses, and similar hit-or-miss strategies. We try to do this before things reach crisis proportion. But even with these efforts, over \$28 million in replenishment and replacement deficiencies still exist in I MEF. Money, which would otherwise be dedicated to replenishment and replacement, is currently being spent to maintain aging equipment. It is a vicious cycle.

I MEF is continually looking for new ways to become more efficient. Through the business reform initiative (BRI) program, I MEF has established the framework for identifying, evaluating, and implementing imaginative, cost-cutting measures in training, operations, and logistics. We have initiated local programs to generate savings, such as a tire retread program, a battery reclamation program, and a local corrosion control

program (combat ready storage program), and we have initiated programs that redistribute maintenance across the echelons of repair. Additionally, we have made every effort to align units that deploy together to establish a “habitual” training relationship which will not only provide a venue for more efficient training but foster early and continuous “team building.”

Teamwork is the “glue” that has allowed I MEF to maintain its posture as a force in constant readiness. From the newest Marine in I MEF to the most senior general, initiative, ingenuity, dedication, and team building have been the force multipliers that have allowed us to forge ahead. What you are hearing is not new--Marines have always been a team – one that uses teamwork to magnify our power and effectiveness. That is what the Marine Air Ground Task Force is all about. That is what I MEF and the Marine Corps are all about: Individual Marines pulling together into a well-honed team.

We must be ready to face ever changing global threats-- from the known, predictable and visible to the unknown, unpredictable, and invisible. This readiness does not come cheap, and your continued support will prove increasingly vital in the coming years. Your future Marines are in boot camp and officer candidate school today. I MEF is ready to fight today’s battles but, we must not mortgage their future. Thank you again for the opportunity to address this committee.